

# Recidivism and Federal Sentencing Policy

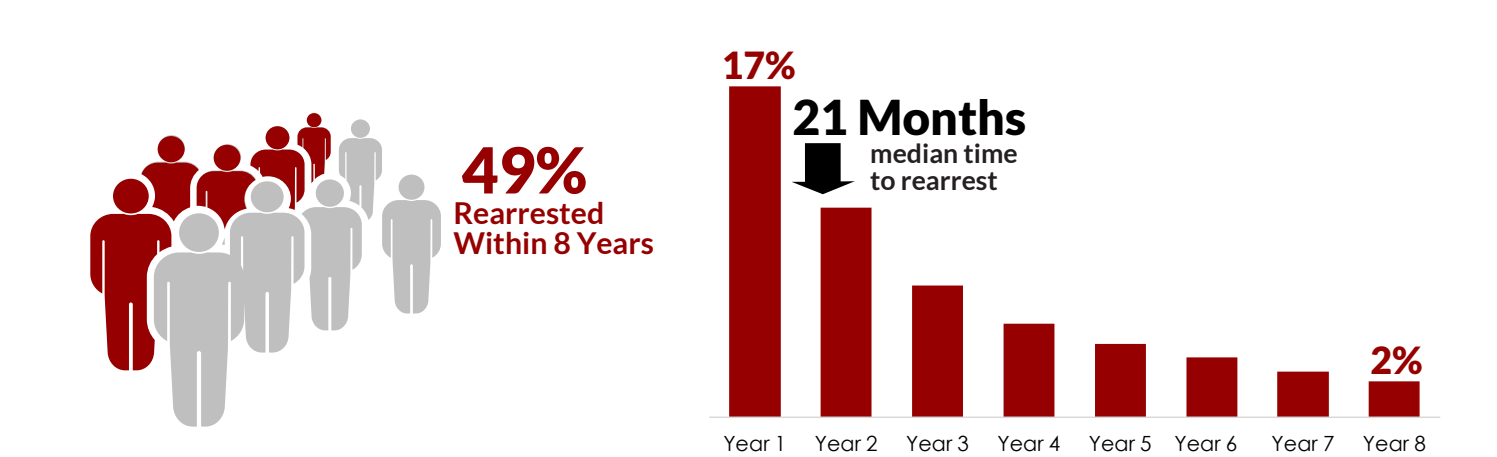
The Commission’s recent multiyear recidivism study is groundbreaking in both its breadth and duration—reporting rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration rates of more than 25,000 federal offenders over an eight-year follow-up period.

Knowing how often criminals reoffend and the types of crimes they commit can help policymakers determine how best to protect public safety, promote effective reentry techniques, and address overcapacity of the prisons. Below are some key findings from the study.

## Overall

Over the eight-year follow-up period, about half of federal offenders were rearrested, almost one-third were reconvicted, and one-quarter were reincarcerated. Of those offenders who reoffended, most did so within the first two years of release.<sup>1</sup>

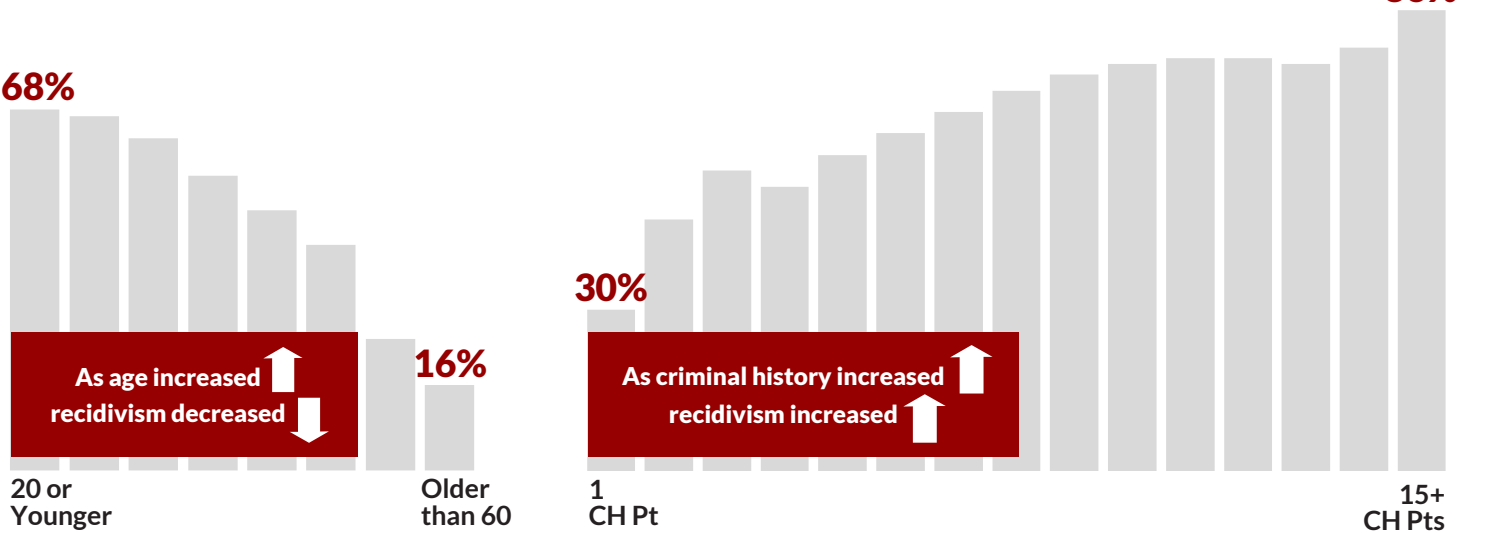
Rearrest Rates Over Eight Years Post-Release



## Offender Characteristics

A federal offender’s age<sup>2</sup> and criminal history<sup>3</sup> were closely correlated with their likelihood of reoffending while an offender’s education level was also associated with their likelihood of reoffending.

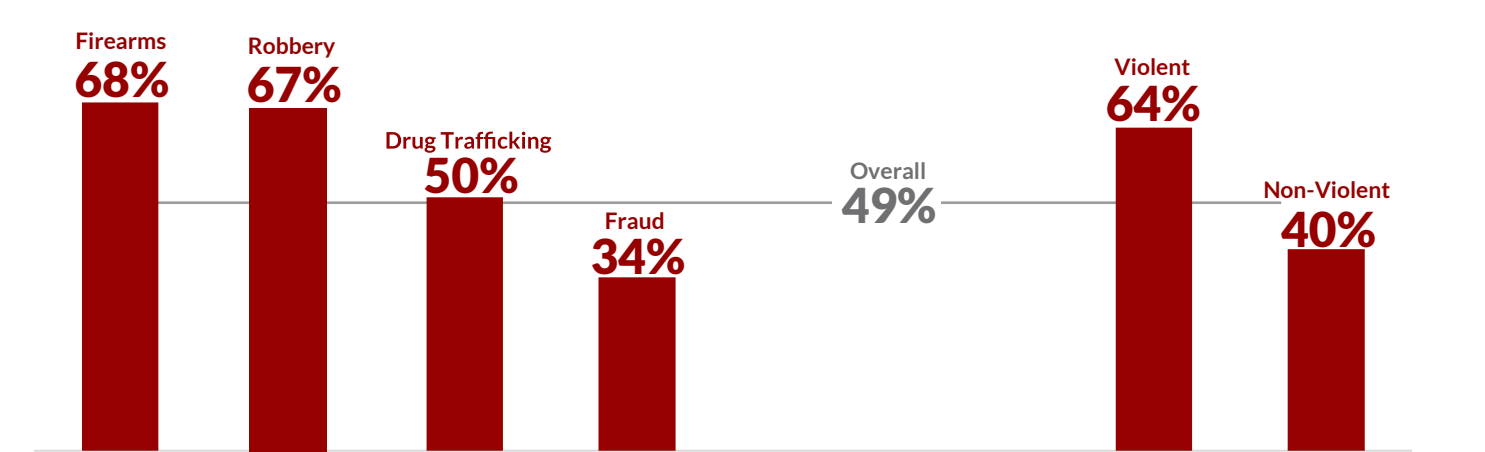
Rearrest Rates Over Eight Years Post-Release



## Crime Types

The type of federal crime that led to an offender’s original conviction was also related to their likelihood of reoffending.<sup>4,5</sup> Firearms offenders were most likely to be rearrested followed closely by robbery offenders. Fraud offenders were least likely to be rearrested. Violent offenders reoffended at a higher rate than non-violent offenders.<sup>6</sup>

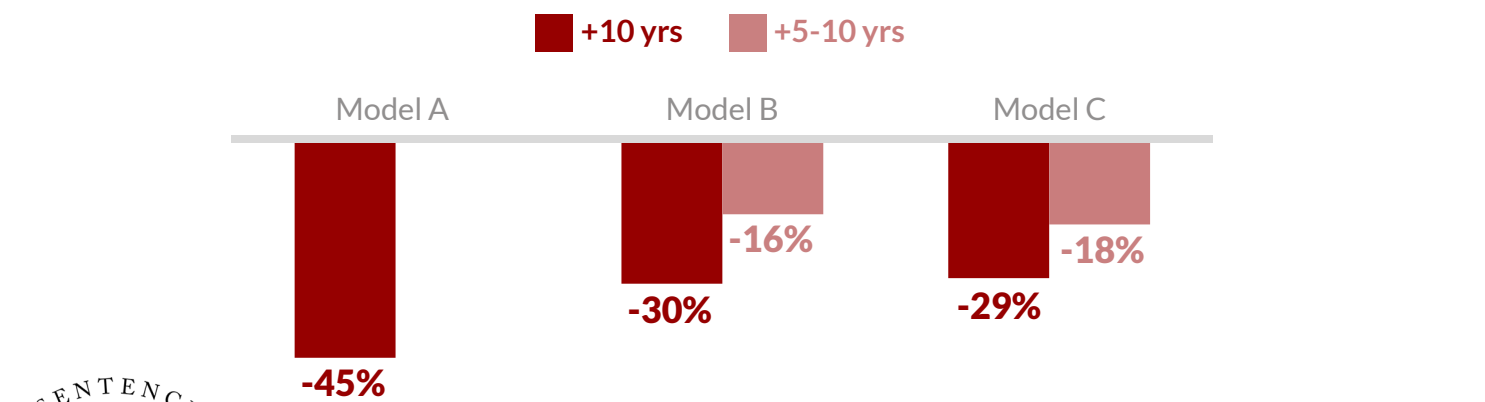
Rearrest Rates Over Eight Years Post-Release



## Sentence Length

Federal offenders serving prison sentences longer than 10 years were less likely to reoffend after eight years than offenders with similar characteristics receiving shorter prison sentences. In two of the three research models (Models B and C), the deterrent effect extended to prison sentences of longer than five years.<sup>7</sup>

Recidivism Odds Over Eight Years Post-Release  
(statistically significant findings)



<sup>1</sup> U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, RECIDIVISM AMONG FEDERAL OFFENDERS: A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW (2016)  
<sup>2</sup> U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, THE EFFECTS OF AGING ON RECIDIVISM AMONG FEDERAL OFFENDERS (2017)  
<sup>3</sup> U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, CRIMINAL HISTORY AND RECIDIVISM OF FEDERAL OFFENDERS (2017)  
<sup>4</sup> U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, RECIDIVISM AMONG FEDERAL DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENDERS (2017)  
<sup>5</sup> U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, RECIDIVISM AMONG FEDERAL FIREARMS OFFENDERS (2019)  
<sup>6</sup> U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, RECIDIVISM AMONG FEDERAL VIOLENT OFFENDERS (2019)  
<sup>7</sup> U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, LENGTH OF INCARCERATION AND RECIDIVISM (2020)